

Introduction

Survival Writing

Contesting the “Pen and Ink Work” of Colonialism

The United States insulates itself within an amnesia that doesn't acknowledge that kind of history. The victors (discoverers, settlers, real estate developers, government leaders, etc.) can afford that, it seems, as long as they maintain control and feel they don't have to face the truth. But Indians? What choice do we have?

—Simon Ortiz, *From Sand Creek*

But spring is floating / to the canyon rim; / needles burst yellow / And the stories have built a new house.

—Wendy Rose, “Story Keeper,” *Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems*

William Apess: Nineteenth-Century Postindian Warrior

In 1829 William Apess, a member of the Pequot tribe of Indians by birth and an itinerant Methodist minister by trade, offered a poignant articulation concerning the power and influence of writing and how it had, in effect, shaped the consciousness of nineteenth-century Americans in a manner detrimental to Natives. He wrote in his autobiographical *A Son of the Forest*, that

The Indian character . . . has been greatly misrepresented. Justice has not and, I may add, justice cannot be fully done to them by the historian. My people have had no press to record their sufferings or to make known their grievances; on this account many a tale of blood and woe has never been known to the public. And during the wars between the natives and the whites, the latter could, through the medium of the newspaper press, circulate extensively every exaggerated account of “Indian cruelty,” while the poor natives had no means of gaining the public ear.¹

Apess was amongst the earliest of Native Americans to commit a chronologically organized idea of his life to pen and ink. In 1829 he published his autobiography, which spoke of his maturation from an abused and discarded child of Pequot stock to a practitioner of the Christian faith who used his considerable energy, talent, and wit to spread a syncretic brand of spirituality amongst the economically marginalized and struggling indigenous populations of New England.² Like a handful of other Native figures of his era who, against considerable cultural and institutional odds, made their way into the realm of print discourse, Apess seemed to have found in Christian evangelism a strategy for survival as well as a venue for doing good amongst his people.

While Apess' Christianity appears to have been perfectly sincere, it is also true that the conventions of his time hardly allowed for him to publicly express his identity in any other manner. As a result, for many generations his life story (and the stories of most writing Indians of this era) was more or less understood as a Christian conversion narrative exemplifying the mandated trajectory of colonial hegemony in which the savage child of the forest willingly takes on the presumably more civilized conduct and beliefs of Western tradition in an effort to lift himself up from the ruins of his race. This narrative was (and is) a form of containment. As long as Apess' story could be fitted within such a crucial dominant paradigm it remained possible to overlook the many instances of resistance and defiance that surface, at times none too subtly, in his body of work.

Apess was not in a complete rhetorical wilderness however. Some sixty years prior to Apess' autobiography, the Mohegan preacher Samson Occom had expressed his own concerns about being misrepresented by colonial powers. In 1768, he opened up a short narrative of his life with these words: "Having Seen and heard Several Representations . . . made by Some gentlemen in America, Concerning me, and finding many gross Mistakes in their Account,—I thought it my Duty to give a Short, Plain and Honest Account of myself, that those who may hereafter see it, may know the truth."³ Like Apess, Occom apprehended the utility of constructing and circulating his own narrative in print to contest the many false suppositions concerning Indian identity that preceded him wherever he traveled.

That their works appeared in print at all was testament to the fact that both Apess and Occom had mastered certain conventions of speech and sentiment that rendered their messages palatable to colonial audiences. Both were professors of the Christian faith and both reflexively resorted to derogatory, but ubiquitous, terms like "my poor brethren" or "the sons and daughters of the forest" when referring in print to their fellow Indians. Such language, however demeaning or culturally biased toward colonial perspectives, had a proven track record of gaining the ears of its intended

white audience. Almost invariably, however, these practitioners of red ink (the first Native writers to emerge in print), despite having taken the measure of the discursive expectations of their day, became controversial and conflicted figures in their time. While their publicized works were upheld as exemplary models of missionary successes in bringing to light a people who, according to many a colonial observer, had heretofore “sate in hellish darknesse,” Native writers found themselves at perpetual cross purposes with colonial/evangelical concerns.⁴ This often led to public denunciations or loss of stature in colonized space, as with Apess who found himself the target of concerted assaults by the press when he attempted to use his traveling pulpit and the power of the pen to argue for the sovereign land rights of the Mashpee Indians of Cape Cod in 1833. The local newspapers labeled Apess an embezzler, agitator, and one whose sermons were “injudicious and somewhat offensive.”⁵ While praised and ordained upon the basis of his early conversion rhetoric, once Apess turned his attention to causes more sympathetic to Native concerns, he was reviled by an evangelical community more interested in Indian subordination than congregation.

The events and stories that shaped Apess’ life drew him to the aforementioned conclusion that “justice has not, and I may add, justice cannot be done to them [the Indians] by the historian.” History, as Apess saw it, was a closed book that had already inscribed its entries in indelible ink, having so convincingly cast the Indian in the role of “blood-thirsty savage,” “child of the forest,” and enemy of “civilization,” that few could see around the offered representations or were capable of considering the Native of America a creation on equal footing with good, white, Christian folk. The functions of history-keeping remained, in fact, the central problematic of Apess’ career as a writer, and I presume, as a preacher. He apprehended how print discourse had stamped a lasting impression upon the cognitive processes of the colonist, in which the Indian was “greatly misrepresented.” Lacking presses, newspapers, or any other means of disseminating information to the public, the Indian seemingly had no tools to counteract the powerfully enduring narratives manifested in colonial writing or to relate the “many a tale of blood and woe [that] has never been [made] known to the public.” If the historian could not do the Indian justice, then who would?

Apess’ perception of this question and his nuanced response in his autobiography and other works make him, in my estimation, one of our earliest models of what Anishinaabe author and critic Gerald Vizenor calls the “postindian warrior.” If the record of the colonist elaborately constructed and maintained a manufactured image of Indianess (a process that Vizenor refers to as “manifest manners”), Apess took it upon himself to gather up the loose makings of memory, experience, and impression, and fashion them into a construct by which he could begin to counter colonial representations

with new and radical expressions of Native identity.⁶ “My image is of God,” he noted in his 1836 *Eulogy on King Philip*. “I am not a beast.”⁷

Apess saw that, where one might hope to find posted a rich historical record of Native engagements and observances in the time of contact, we find instead a counter presence, a canard, a complex fiction of Indian identity that, in various ways, fulfilled a multifaceted colonial agenda. Sometimes, as in the story of the “Pilgrim fathers” arriving on these shores, that representation was of the helpful Indian, usually acting in isolation of other members of his race, who taught the settlers how to plant in a strange climate and survive the harsh New England winters. These Natives were presumably drawn in by the innate superiority of European culture and religion, and many were reported to have converted over to this new form of spirituality (usually on their death beds, where there was little chance for circumstances to test the veracity of such claims). More often, however, the Native was seen as the irredeemable “beast” or savage, so vile and treacherous that he needed to be wholly exterminated from the face of the earth both physically and psychologically.⁸ These contrasting Native figures are largely irreconcilable to the American consciousness, occupying the same space at once in an image that flits back and forth with the light as in a child’s refractor toy. But in either case, these figures represent a glaring absence of indigenous thought, belief, community, practice, and presence.

These enduring colonial representations are usefully acknowledged by Vizenor to be “the simulations of dominance,” reflecting the “absence of the tribal real” over “the ruins of tribal representation.”⁹ In back of Vizenor’s assertion is the apprehension that representation can never make claims to authenticate reality. History itself is an acknowledged construction that simply furthers the biases of its scribes and compilers. It cannot transcend its own medium as representation. In his work *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor draws upon the example of Rene Magritte’s painting of a pipe that bears the inscription “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.” Likewise, he views Andy Warhol’s silkscreen of Indian activist Russell Means and concludes, “this is not an indian.”¹⁰ By extension, one can trace the entire colonial record of contact with Natives and ask, what of Native identity is legitimately being portrayed? Vizenor writes,

The Indian was an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation . . . The postindian is the absence of the convention . . . the critical distinction is that postindian warriors create a new tribal presence in stories. The simulations of manifest manners are dominance, the scriptures of civilization in paradise. The counteractions of postindian warriors are the simulations of survivance.¹¹

In other words, colonial representations of Native identity, solidified and passed down through the historical archive, create a fictive presence around which colonial aggression and acquisition have been carelessly, and often ruthlessly, justified. These fictive presences have cast their shadow over the work of Native writers in the colonial period, who, while struggling to effect positive change in their respective communities, were ultimately cast as apostates to Native identity. If Apess was a postindian warrior, it is because he labored in his written works to counteract such representations and place something substantive and complex in their stead that took into account indigenous memories and epistemologies mixed with a liberal sprinkling of historical irony. As such, William Apess was a practitioner of *survivance*.

It remains certain, however, that when Americans reflect back upon their early days of nation formation, their imagination rarely settles upon the Native who, with pen in hand, forged intellectual arguments for Native rights, Native sovereignty, and peaceful coexistence on the land. The silence Apess apprehended concerning the legitimacy of Native experience was rendered as an absolute absence in the colonial archive, a stricken signifier, or what I refer to in this work as the repeated acts of colonial *unwitnessing*. Native writers of the colonial period and beyond were under the constant imposition of having to forge an idiom that recognized the tightly constrained discursive parameters permitted them by print culture, while simultaneously reconstructing a positive Native presence from within those constraints and holding it out for colonial audiences to acknowledge. The result of such efforts was an at times conflicted, always embedded literature that has been regarded more for its implied cultural concessions to colonial pieties than for its heroic acts of Native advocacy, invention, and resistance.

Apess, from his nineteenth-century perspective, would have had little insight, given the scarce resources at his disposal, into the efforts of the many Natives who preceded him, employing the tools of European literacy in an attempt to benefit Native lives and political standing in an earlier period of contact and colonization. In fact, there remains even today a paucity of information dealing directly with this subject. While Apess was correct in noting how those powerful tools of empire, the pen and the press, remained the bulwark of colonialism, still, others had stood before him, making similar claims and protests, marshaling many like forces of compromise and resistance, and endeavoring to leave some kind of lasting impression not only of the individual self, but of sustained Native presence in a newly colonized world. Perhaps Apess had apprehended bits and pieces of this written legacy, and I am inclined to believe that he hoped to place himself somewhere within that still elusive, amorphous tradition that included such figures as Samson Occom, Hendrick Aupaumut, Joseph Johnson, James Printer, Caleb Cheeshateaumauk, Thomas Waban, and others. Natives had,

in fact, been picking up the pen in America for nearly two hundred years prior to Apess' literary interventions in the early nineteenth century. As will be made apparent, many of these individuals were closely associated with the leadership and community structures of their people and played an integral role in strategizing and negotiating tribal standings. They remain, for the most part, fondly recalled by the local indigenous groups they served as they helped to effect substantial accomplishments and lasting gains for their respective communities in their time. They had bartered for their indigenous rights, inscribed the decisions and decrees of their councils, negotiated land transactions, penetrated Harvard College and other colonial institutions of higher learning, and labored to become brokers for their often embattled communities. Some there were who actually held their hand upon the very lever of the press that Apess claimed had been historically denied them. But their efforts have rarely been noted or offered up as a body of work that might be considered to have the substance that adheres to what we in the business refer to as a "literary tradition." Each Native writer of this period has been traditionally regarded as a figure standing in isolation, an exception, or a genius of unusual talents who, by mastering European literacy, had in effect embraced colonial norms and turned his or her back upon Native peoples and traditions. Rarely if ever has anyone attempted to place these writers in a continuum of influence and tradition that values their contribution to the persistence of Native lifeways in colonial times. The project of *Red Ink* is to acknowledge and define such a contribution and to examine the manner in which a reinvigorated methodology for processing the works and lives of these Native writers must inevitably recalibrate our understanding of the colonial period and the dynamics of contact. While Western modes of literacy were introduced with a very specific set of colonial intentions, they were most often appropriated and mastered by Natives for quite different reasons. *Red Ink* is an extended effort to comprehend and delineate the motives of these individuals, their writings, and the unacknowledged indigenous epistemologies they served.

Unwitnessing: Cultural Amnesia and the Art of Continuance

To the European adventurer, explorer, or settler of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the indigenous peoples of America had no real culture of which to speak. A people without writing were regarded as a people without the means of organizing themselves under any sort of defined spiritual, legal, or historical principles. As such, their claims to sovereignty, land entitlement, or even the most basic human right to exist became suspect in the eye of the dominant culture and remains so to this day. Historian

Douglas Edward Leach noted in his influential 1958 *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, that “The New England Indians were a primitive people occupying a much lower level of civilization than that of the English settlers who moved in upon them during the seventeenth century.”¹² This leads him to infer that “government and law, like religion, seem to have been no more than vague concepts amongst these Indians.”¹³ Leach was merely echoing a long line of assumptions that had been sustained and promoted by the manifest manners of the colonial archive from the very first moments of cultural contact.

Columbus, upon reaching the West Indies in his first voyage in 1492, persistently remarked how the islanders he met “would easily be made Christians, for they appeared to me to have no religion.”¹⁴ Amerigo Vespucci wrote back from his travels in 1498 that “amongst those people we did not learn that they had any law, nor can they be called Moors nor Jews, and they are worse than pagans, because we never saw them offer any sacrifice.”¹⁵ In the earliest document brought back from New England’s first settlement in Plymouth, Massachusetts, one commentator noted how the Natives are “few and doe but run over the grasse, as doe also the Foxes and wildebeests: they are not industrious, neither have art, science, skill or faculties to use either the land or the commodities of it.”¹⁶ From the very first recorded meetings, then, Europeans saw Native culture as a blank slate upon which they could (and must) superimpose their own belief systems.

The sense that the indigenous peoples of America were scattered and unformed, lacking the most basic ligaments of community, artistic expression, and belief, was patently false, and is quite often belied by the very commentators who made such assertions. For instance, during his second voyage, Columbus noted that “each of the many kings in Hispaniola and the other islands and on the mainland has his special house apart from the village . . . Here there is no other activity except the service of the *cemies* [religious idols carved from wood] and the Indians perform certain prayers and ceremonies here as we do in church.”¹⁷ While Columbus continues to describe these and other ceremonies at some length, the whole passage is prefaced with the claim, “I have not been able to discover any idolatry or other religious belief amongst them.”¹⁸ Fray Ramon Pané, who was sent by Columbus to study and, if possible, convert the Tainos in 1494, offered an even more detailed account of their cultural lives, observing,

they have their laws gathered in ancient songs, by which they govern themselves, as do the Moors by their scripture. And when they wish to sing their songs, they play a certain instrument that is called mayohabao, which is made of wood, hollow, strong, and very thin, the length of an arm and half in width. The part that is played is made in the shape of a blacksmith’s tongs, and the

other part resembles a mace so that it looks like a long-necked squash. And they play this instrument, which has a voice so loud that it can be heard from a distance of a league and a half. To its sound they sing their songs, which they learn by heart, and the principal men play it; they learn to play it as children and to sing with it, according to their custom.¹⁹

These passages and countless others make it abundantly clear that indigenous life was highly codified, deeply spiritual, and held together by the same kinds of sustaining rituals, based in organically conceived, communally acknowledged narrative constructs, as were the orders of European belief.

The early English settlers of the American northeast in the seventeenth-century also came into contact with organized communities, that however different from European models, were nevertheless easily recognizable to them as villages replete with laws, customs, and cultivated fields for sustenance. It was the bounty of these villages that sustained the Puritans in the first years at Plymouth. While we often think of the Pilgrims as having learned, with the help of Squanto, to provide for themselves, they in fact traded vigorously with the local Native villages. Edward Winslow notes how, in one 1622 excursion, the settlers purchased “eight hogsheds of corn and beans” at Manamoycke and “eight or ten hogsheds” more at Mattachiest.²⁰ The Pilgrims survived on these Native surplus stores, and yet, as noted earlier, Winslow was still capable of asserting of these locals that “they are not industrious, neither have art, science, skill or faculties to use either the land or the commodities of it.” What European explorers witnessed on the one hand, they *unwitnessed* with the other.

As Roy Harvey Pearce has observed, colonists came to define *civilization* itself as the counterpart to *savagism*, which was the term most often used to evoke (or revoke) Native civilization. In fact, according to the sixteenth-century Spanish monk Bartolomé de las Casas, the very term “barbarian” was commonly understood to denote “those who do not have a written language that corresponds to the spoken one.”²¹ In effect, as European culture began to violently plant itself on these American shores, it subsequently suffered a crisis of identity that could only fully define itself in contrast to what it supposed it was not. The way to maintain such a dichotomy was by categorically refusing to acknowledge the cultural validity, even the essential humanity, of that which was being culturally eliminated. For, if indigenous culture proved all too human, all too civilized, the violence of removing it from view would provoke an axial shift, all at once illegitimizing the presumed superiority of European culture.²²

Writing itself becomes the essential cultural marker of Western superiority. A people who write are a people whose traditions and laws are

preserved and passed on coherently from one generation to the next. And at the foundation of all Western writing was the book, the Bible, the word of God, beamed from the mind of God himself to the pens of the prophets. While Western epistemologies were seen as fixed, set in stone so to speak, Native systems of thought and belief appeared prone to corruption, fantasy, and invention. And so it was recorded by every European commentator who visited these shores. As long as Native responses to such frameworks of thought remained tightly sealed in the colonial lock box of archival containment and representation serving the agenda of colonial discourses, it was difficult for any resistant understanding of these encounters to materialize. The authority invested in such claims, supported as they are by centuries of colonial reportage, continue to weigh heavily on the consciousness of the twenty-first century.

It is my contention that, by summarily *unwitnessing* Native civilization and refusing to acknowledge the ligaments of community and belief upon which Native lives were structured, the colonists behaved much like trauma patients who have “blocked out” certain memories of the past in order to cope in the present. The result is that narratives sustaining to Native life in colonial times were effectively papered over by the dominant discourse disseminated in print. While Natives who entered into the realm of print discourse in the colonial period were not always, in their views and stances, in lock step with one another or necessarily representative of all indigenous culture at the time, they nevertheless contributed to an emerging body of Native intellectual tradition that dynamically engaged the settler culture and stamped their own presence upon a period that, in response, has collaborated to deny their historical relevance.

Unwitnessing is not simply the conscious act of turning a blind eye. Nor is it the result, necessarily, of ignorance or an utter failure of imagination. *Unwitnessing* is the largely passive decision to maintain a particular narrative structure by keeping undesirable aspects of cultural memory repressed or inactive. For European explorers and settlers of the colonial period these undesirable aspects of memory consisted of repeated acts of denigration and violence toward Native peoples, which stood in sharp relief to the rhetoric of uplift driving so much of the colonial endeavor. The Puritans of New England, in particular, were heavily invested in “convincing the heathen of their evil ways, and converting them to the true knowledge and worship of the living God, and so consequently the salvation of their souls.”²³ In the charters of all the English companies that first settled America were prominently placed provisions for improving the lives of the “savages.” Their unrealistic expectation was that Native peoples would quickly acknowledge the superiority of European belief systems and seamlessly assimilate themselves into the rank and file, ceding land and culture along the way. The resulting

rift between rhetoric and deed was not simply an embarrassing contradiction. It was, in my estimation, a trauma operating on a culture-wide level, driving colonists to spontaneously distort and amend their collective memory. This distortion inevitably manifests itself in the archival representation of the acts in question, in which undesirable knowledge is at once noted and then immediately stricken out, or unwitnessed. As with all significant trauma narratives, these representations bear the burden of knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing all at once.²⁴

As I will demonstrate, the process of unwitnessing can be seen in effect almost every time a European observer commented upon the lives and cultures of America's indigenous peoples. Colonial reporters would offer detailed observations about Native customs, traditions, and spiritual practices before concluding that these very same qualities were, in fact, nonexistent in indigenous life. In every case what was physically observed gave way to a more persuasive ideological noesis in which the colonists might see themselves as bringing Christian belief and civilization to a people who suffered for the want of such niceties as law, culture, religion, and, most importantly, writing. In other words, to maintain the ideological framework of the colonial endeavor the evidence of the senses had to be rhetorically undone. Once having denied the existence of Native culture it was a relatively small step to deny or suppress the presence of the Indian himself, leading to the unwitnessing of entire Native communities referred to in modern parlance as the trope of the vanishing race.

To properly understand the paradoxical functions of unwitnessing, one must first appreciate the significance of narrative, strictly speaking, in the cultural lives of all peoples. When Greek/Cherokee novelist and essayist Thomas King asserts, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are," he is acknowledging the important, even indispensable, role narrative plays in the formation of cultural identity.²⁵ If one's cultural narrative is disrupted by violent events or policies, the core of selfhood is disrupted as well. Psychologist and trauma scholar Judith Herman writes about the manner in which trauma, as clinically understood, is also in essence the disruption of narrative. She notes that traumatic memories "are not encoded like the ordinary memories of adults in a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story," but rather it is as if "time stops at the moment of trauma."²⁶ The person or group of people who suffer from this effect have lost the ability to enfold the moment of rupture at the heart of the trauma into a linear narrative structure. Even the verbal or oral structure of the memory is inhibited. The narrative of the trauma sufferers becomes static. Such a trauma defines the colonial encounter and informs the history that has resulted from it. The dominant society manifests this trauma by exhibiting historical or cultural amnesia, a willful forgetting of their complicity in

acts of violence by which they claimed an “empty” land for themselves. By forging a narrative in which Native community did not exist or was “static” and incapable of moving forward, the dominant culture solidified a paradigm that insinuated itself into every aspect of its historical and literary narratives.

In Native American studies the concept of “continuance” offers the rhetorical materials of healing traumatic rupture or unwitnessing. Continuance might be viewed as the assertion of a political and cultural consciousness that works to restore Native traditions and histories to a linear narrative structure after centuries of colonial disruption. Rather than regarding the moment of contact with Europeans as the locus of an irrevocable epistemological split or fragmentation, Native scholars like Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, Lisa Brooks, and Craig Womack have succeeded in recent years in focusing instead on the unbroken materials of culture, tradition, and history that can be made a part of a continuing narrative of Native presence on the North American continent both before and after contact. Osage scholar Robert Warrior refers to this renewed focus as exercising “intellectual sovereignty,” and his articulation of this concept has helped carve out a wider trail for those interested in honoring the “intellectual traditions” forged by earlier Native thinkers and writers. Rather than regarding Native American civil rights movements as a modern phenomenon spontaneously generated from within the cultural milieu of the sixties and furthered by the subsequent “Native literary renaissance” of the seventies and eighties, Warrior maintains that the roots of rhetorical resistance sink much deeper. He suggests that Native writers and scholars of the past faced similar situations and that

when we take that tradition seriously . . . we empower our work . . . Far from engaging in some new and novel practice that belongs necessarily to the process of assimilating and enculturating non-Native values, we are doing something that Natives have done for hundreds of years—something that can be and has been an important part of resistance to assimilation and survival.²⁷

Declaring intellectual sovereignty is a process of cultural affirmation in the current moment, but it is also necessarily a historical process and one that more often than not finds itself in contention with the institutional memory of the dominant culture. For instance, as indigenous nations search for ways, both within their own communities and within the legal frameworks of American jurisdiction, to solidify their political and historical presence, the United States refuses to officially remember the particulars of treaties or to even recognize the existence of entire nations despite the unambiguous manner in which these entities appear in archival sources. An excellent example of this, as the ensuing chapters will demonstrate, is the case of

the Nipmuc of New England who, despite being referenced in the earliest colonial records and maintaining a continuous land base from colonial times to the present, remain federally unrecognized (unwitnessed) as a tribal entity. In the eyes of the federal government, the Nipmuc do not exist.

One might conclude that such results are part of an inevitable power dynamic, and that the victors of a particular encounter have always retained the privilege of writing and defining history. As I hope to demonstrate however, the process at work is more complicated than this. In fact, those who do return to the written archives to construct historical narratives are often tarred with the dubious label of “revisionist,” as though *they* are the ones in fact altering the historical record. This is largely a consequence of the manner in which the settler culture has so meticulously forgotten the materials, in effect the history, it has itself recorded but subsequently repressed. The inherent violence of unwitnessing destabilizes the historical process, legitimating violence and oppression by relying on intrinsically ahistorical narrative frameworks. The maintenance of such frameworks is ultimately detrimental to the psychic and material life of a community, locking it into cycles of irreparable violence to itself and others. As Judith Herman makes clear, it takes more than the recovery of a particular historical narrative to heal this affliction. She observes that advances only occur when they are supported by political movements powerful enough to legitimate alliances between groups, and

to counteract the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial. In the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting. Repression, dissociation, and denial are phenomena of social as well as individual consciousness.²⁸

Shamefully violent historical events, policies, and decisions may acquire an archival presence—the Pequot massacre, Sand Creek, Wounded Knee, Rosewood, My Lai, Abu Ghraib—but even when such occurrences are repeatedly addressed and articulated by those who feel afflicted by them, they have a tendency to recede back into the peripheries of acceptable knowledge, unable to permanently lodge themselves in the general consciousness. This speaks to the political resiliency of the narratives that have been used to paper over traumatic knowledge. Nevertheless, traumatic knowledge, or what Vizenor sometimes refers to as the “tragic wisdom” of those who must continue to bear these disrupted memories, does not go away. It surfaces and resurfaces throughout time, bleeding through the protective layers of colonial coating like thick red ink.²⁹ In ways with which we have yet to adequately come to terms, it is the colonizing culture in the Americas that

suffers irreparable traumatic lapses, while it becomes incumbent upon the indigenous cultures to practice acts of what Vizenor thinks of as *survivance*, or the furtherance of indigenous narrative structures that work to “mediate and undermine the literature of dominance.”³⁰

The attempt to reenvision narratives of Native presence in the colonial period so that they reflect continuity and survivance rather than inevitable fragmentation and loss of culture is a viable method for confronting the trauma that still actively disrupts America’s intellectual engagement with its past. To achieve this, however, we must cultivate new strategies of engaging with the archival materials at hand. The disruptive force of cultural contact was not such that all traces of prior indigenous understanding and practice simply crumpled upon impact. Native writers of the colonial period were inevitably drawing from the discourse communities with which they were most familiar when Native space and colonial space overlapped. Native writers more often than not mastered alphabetic literacy for the purposes of assisting those communities in their interactions with the colonists. As such, many of the works I examine here fall securely under the rubric of what Jace Weaver has called “communitist” or literature that demonstrates “a proactive commitment to Native community.”³¹ If this simple but vital notion has often been overlooked by commentators and critics, it is largely because history failed to thoroughly examine from a Native-centered perspective the intellectual traditions that powered such a discourse.

Containment and Engagement: Unpacking History in the Longhouse of the Archive

It is often assumed that Native groups resisted the introduction of what, for the purposes of clarity, I refer to here as “alphabetic writing.”³² This skill, however, was actively sought out and incorporated into existing Native systems of encoding information, just as a host of other European tools, trade goods, and practices were appreciated and folded into traditional routines. The reasons for doing so were complex and varied, but predominately centered upon combating the effects of colonialism by improving negotiating positions in treaties, land sales, and other cultural transactions. If it is assumed that with the introduction of writing came an uncritical assimilation into Christian norms, a May 19, 1774 letter from the “Farmington” Indians to Governor Trumbull of the Connecticut Colony demonstrates the complexity of Native motives. The letter reads:

Most of us have . . . in some measure become acquainted with,
and formed some General Ideas of the English Custom and

Manners, and many of said Tribe have been instructed in Reading and writing in English, and have at Considerable expense in attaining the same, and furnishing our Selves with Bibles and some other Books in English, for our further Instruction though poorly able to bear the Expense thereof. And we being desirous to make further proficiency in English Literature, and especially to be acquainted with the Statute Laws of this Colony, which appears to us highly Necessary, since our English Fathers inform us that we are Considered by them as being Subject to the Laws and Civil Regulations of this Colony, and many of said Statutes being made with a Special view for the Government and regulation of the Indians . . . do therefore pray your Honors to give us a Colony Law Book.³³

The Farmington Indians may have had to pay lip service to Christianity in order to gain the education in alphabetic literacy they sought, but of more concern to them were the “Statute Laws of this Colony” that directly and adversely affected their livelihoods despite their lack of representation in devising such laws. Having come within a ring of colonial containment, they sought to master the forms by which they were being subjugated in order to better protect and preserve their own status as an individual people.

The ways that Natives engaged with Western literacy cannot, in the end, be read as an unqualified success story, nor is it my objective to make it one. The price Native communities have been forced to pay so that Europeans could transplant themselves on this soil is by every measure too high. By investigating the textual endeavors of Natives in this period, however, and the underlying motives for such endeavors, we can harvest the narrative materials that lead to a more cohesive understanding of both Native and colonial life. As Native communities became increasingly more disenfranchised, marginalized, and therefore “invisible” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it became imperative for Natives to further engage with the dominant culture and insist upon a political presence within this nation’s borders. On some occasions such an insistence was pursued through retaliation and open warfare. But a battle was also being waged on the textual front, an effort to either secure the rights of Native communities or to influence the overall conversation concerning indigenous rights and historical grievances.

Through an engagement with European literary practices, many Native communities, and particularly the Algonquian communities I focus on here, were able to sustain a period of stability and keep alive traditional modes of existence that were otherwise threatened by forced fragmentation and the transformed physical reality of the colonized world. What began as a series of pragmatic engagements to achieve quite local ends became an increas-

ingly more innovative and energetic process by which embattled, decimated communities seized the opportunity to come together in a revitalized Native space. This process also became the means of challenging the dominant culture's ability to construct and control Native identity from both within and without the very site of power, the house of the archive, from which such a construction is generated.

It remains problematic, therefore, that the first steps that Natives took toward reading and writing are often thought of as the first steps taken away from traditional Native culture and Native community. Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko notes that "amongst the Pueblo people, a written speech or statement is highly suspect because the true feelings of the speaker remain hidden as she reads words that are detached from the occasion and the audience."³⁴ Such sentiments are as old as Socrates, but a distrust of writing also stems from the very real awareness that Native communities were misled time and time again in land sales and treaty documents with colonial powers, the contents of which often differed greatly from the details of the orally communicated agreements through which they were negotiated. A telling example of this can be found in the transcription of the 1744 treaty at Lancaster, Pennsylvania when the Seneca orator Canasatego pointed out to the assembled delegates that his people had been constantly deceived in such negotiations. He claims, "we are now straitened, and sometimes in want of Deer, and liable to many other Inconveniences since the English came amongst us, and particularly from that Pen and Ink Work that is going on at the Table (pointing to the secretary)."³⁵ Canasatego's explicit distrust of "pen and ink work," while justified in every way, provoked many Native individuals and communities at the time to seek to master its properties rather than shun them.

But the sense of tension between American Indians and the written word clearly persists. In well-meaning high school and college curricula it is taught that Native Americans first encountered the letter through nineteenth-century institutionalized boarding schools. Native children were brought far from their homes to reside in these schools and were forced to cut their hair, abandon their traditional dress, and forbidden to speak their own languages. Carlisle School founder Richard Henry Pratt's often invoked dictum, "kill the Indian and save the man," offers a helpful summation of the cultural violence done by these institutions, whatever the intentions of some of the well-meaning people (including Natives) who signed on to such endeavors. Countless children died in these institutionalized incubators of germs and disease. Many others came home and faced difficulties reintegrating themselves into their own families and communities after having been so forcefully purged of their cultural underpinnings. But these schools also became a launching pad for the careers of prominent nineteenth-century

Indian writers, activists, and intellectuals like Charles Eastman, Zitkala-Sa, Charles Montezuma, and Luther Standing Bear, all of whom had ultimately conflicted feelings about their schooling and wrote eloquently of their experiences.³⁶

These are all important remembrances, and they have been brought into our educational discourse, in part, to repair a historical trauma. But they also help to reinforce the impression that Native Americans were ultimately resistant to the technology of writing or that writing was a tool that did more harm than good for a people grounded in oral traditions. As Peter Nabokov notes in his investigation of oral noetics, *A Forest of Time*, the “symbols of writing and the Book became such diagnostics for the invasive society, and of its ominous, depersonalized efficiency, as to insinuate themselves into their [indigenous peoples’] most ahistorical genres.”³⁷ Writing and the Book are repeatedly held up as the distinctive markers of the civilization being imposed by Euro-Americans and vehemently rejected by Natives. And, as Nabokov suggests, even attempts to recuperate “ahistorical,” or oral, traditions are considered to be contaminated by their emergence into the realm of written records and accounts. In effect, once a discursive tradition is communicated in alphabetic writing, it is thought to have entered into what French theorist Jacques Derrida refers to as the “house of the archive,” or “the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded.”³⁸ Having entered into such a space is, at least according to many theorists, like entering into the “Roach Motels” advertised some years ago on television with the understanding that once you “check in” you can never “check out.” Narrative then falls under the interpretive jurisdiction of those who control its production. I will refer to this “house of the archive,” which is the house of hegemonic control and containment, throughout this work.

The house of the archive is engendered by a cultural impulse, or instinct, that necessitates the construction of an external house of memory, a domicile where memory is officially stored and inevitably molded into the shape of the desire of those who determine to house such memories. But the archive, as it is manifested in the domain of Western influence, also manages to hide from itself its authoritative, or patriarchic, agenda. As Derrida elucidates, the word itself, *archive*, shelters its own roots. Within its linguistic coding resides the Greek *arkheion*, which means “house or domicile,” and *arkhe*, which means both “government” and “to rule,” suggesting that the archive is both the location of power and the will to power. But the contemporary usage of the word “archive” typically suggests something more passive, a purely neutral information bank, completely unwitnessing its lineage to power. This is called up, as well as partially forgotten, in the notion of the “ark of the covenant,” the lost archive that remains, nonethe-

less, the source of authority for Judeo-Christian culture. As Derrida notes, “it contains the stone tablets, but *arca* [in Latin] is also the cupboard, the coffin, the prison cell, or the cistern, the reservoir” that holds and concretizes law from its lost or displaced center.³⁹

The idea that the archive seems to shelter both memory and forgetfulness is useful for a number of reasons. The presumably neutral archive brought under our interpretive historical lens contains deposits of both colonial and indigenous memory. But because what has been housed there is catalogued and maintained by the authorizers of a particularly monologic set of skills and beliefs, the materials that have been preserved, under house arrest so to speak, work in the service, both advertently and inadvertently, of that authority or system of laws. Native civilization and title to the land may seem to rhetorically vanish within the jurisdiction of this archive, but such presences also had to be inscribed before they could be elided. Thus the archive maintains a substratum of suppressed memory. As Derrida notes, “if one is under the impression that it is possible not to take this into account, forgetting it, effacing it, crossing it out, or objecting to it, one has already confirmed, we could say even countersigned (thus archived), a ‘repression’ or a ‘suppression.’”⁴⁰

That which is archived works inexorably toward the production of a deliberate field of knowledge. It constructs thought and tradition in accordance with the powers of the house of the archive. Whatever works in resistance to that field of knowledge, thought, and power is not necessarily erased, but stricken out or decontextualized. As such, the house of the archive is a source of power and containment. And yet I remain somewhat skeptical of its totalizing nature as expressed by Derrida and others, and tend to view it as yet one more gesture toward colonial appropriation. There remain bodies of thought and knowledge that, even as they interact with the archival house of power, draw their narrative cohesion from beyond its purview and are a part of what anthropologist James C. Scott refers to as the “hidden transcript,” or the vestiges of cultural narrative that escape the notice of the “archons” or keepers of the archive.⁴¹ According to Scott, in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, “every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a ‘hidden transcript’ that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.”⁴² This critique, far from being an ineffectual venting of frustration or acting out of resistant fantasies, forms the parameters of resistance that define the privileges even the most oppressed populations negotiate for themselves on a daily basis from within the realms of power. Scott acknowledges the inherent problems of delving into the archive, which is “consecrated to the official ‘public transcript,’” as a means of interpreting so-called marginalized cultures and their forms of resistance. He correctly observes that resistance within the archive is always “mediated by the

interpretation of dominant elites.” But he also perceives the strategies that resistant groups employ to subvert such mediation.

One way in which subordinate groups cover their tracks is by *appearing* to contribute to the authorized transcript. The result of this is that resistance is always present and always masked. Scott concludes that, for the sake of the official transcript, a resistant slave will always strike the appearance of the model slave, a poacher will always present the face of the peaceful respecter of property, a tax cheat will always file a form that looks proper on the books, and so forth. “The social evidence will almost always represent a confirmation of the status quo in hegemonic terms.”⁴³ By the same token, a Native who lives according to her/his traditional beliefs within a colonized space will most likely wear the mantle of Christian conversion. Resistance may be fully anticipated and even assumed, but historically speaking, it remains difficult to pinpoint its locus unless it erupts in outright rebellion. While Scott, in his analysis, does not deal explicitly with Native American cultures, he notes how oral traditions, in particular, “due simply to their means of transmission, offer a kind of seclusion, control, and even anonymity that make them ideal vehicles for cultural resistance.”⁴⁴

Can there not stand alongside the house of the archive interpretive frameworks that do not fall under its domain? Perhaps a *longhouse* of the archive, with roots in Native epistemologies? In Algonquian culture, of course, the longhouse, or big house as it is sometimes called, is the central location of ceremony and spirituality, a structure whose form and design embraces “the celestial universe . . . in terms of time and space,” offering an architecture of meaning and experience that eludes Western structures of knowledge.⁴⁵ It is a space of vision and memory, narrative and tradition that is altogether too tangible and rich to be consigned to the margins of experience or interpretive suzerainty.

Even granting the possibility of an independent, sovereign archive, however, we must remain keenly aware of just how much historical interpretation is driven by European standards of perception and European agendas organized around the principle and authority of the written word. Luther Standing Bear, who was amongst the first class of Native Americans to attend the Indian Boarding School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879, wryly noted of the “white man,”

his law was a written law; his divine Decalogue reposed in a book. And what better proof that his advent into this country and his subsequent acts were the result of divine will! He brought the Word! There ensued a blind worship of written history, of books, of the written word, that has denuded the spoken word of its power and sacredness [my text reads “scaredness,” but I

trust that this, too, might be thought of as a culturally driven editorial slippage]. The written word became established as a criterion of the superior man—a symbol of emotional fineness. The man who could write his name on a piece of paper, whether or not he possessed the spiritual fineness to honor those words in speech, was by some miraculous formula a more highly developed and sensitized person than the one who had never had a pen in hand, but whose spoken word was inviolable and whose sense of honor and truth was paramount.⁴⁶

We should not regard it as ironic that Standing Bear himself was leveling this indictment in writing. He is not *against* writing as a technology. He is merely cognizant of the bogus hierarchy that has been established and maintained—the fact that “with false reasoning was the quality of human character measured by man’s ability to make with an implement a mark upon paper.”⁴⁷

For those of us who would like to engage in a historical/literary discourse of the Americas that takes into account Native American viewpoints, the project becomes one of locating Native texts and traditions and placing them within a context that is neither entirely separate from, nor beholden to, Western literary traditions or archival jurisdiction. Native American literacy has a life and mind all its own and its roots sink deeper than even our latest academic forays into gaze-shifting, or a more inclusive canonical framework, might suggest. As Womack has asserted, a Native American literary criticism should “emphasize unique Native worldviews and political realities, search for differences as often as similarities, and attempt to find Native literature’s place in Indian country, rather than Native literature’s place in the canon.”⁴⁸

This certainly applies to Native-produced texts during the colonial period. Abenaki historian Lisa Brooks explains how the most common forms that Native writing took in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflect earlier Native traditions. She points here to *awikhigans*, or hieroglyphic symbols written on trees and birch bark to recount the results of hunting or military expeditions, and wampum, the small shells strung together in patterns, which according to Iroquois tradition, bound “words to deeds.” In other words, she views Native forays into the textual world of Europeans as an extension of their own non-alphabetic modes of encoding history and culture. Brooks notes that “transformations occurred when the European system of writing entered Native space. Birch bark messages became letters and petitions, wampum records became treaties, journey pictographs became written ‘journals.’” Brooks maintains that the “texts that emerged from within the Native space of the northeast represent a uniquely indigenous literary tradition.”⁴⁹

This tradition needs to be comprehended more fully before one can enter into a useful discussion on how Native Americans appropriated the skills of alphabetic literacy, and in my first chapter I spend some time thinking about how pre-Columbian systems of Native writing functioned within a primarily oral culture. I have personally seen belts of wampum, looked at Sioux Winter Counts, even walked through Petroglyph National Forest in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and yet it still came as something of an epiphany to me when I began this project that American Indians had their own recorded systems of transmitting information prior to European colonization. Perhaps I had read at some point that the Mayans had developed systems of writing, and kept libraries full of books before Cortez appeared and razed it all to the ground. I had heard, in some vague context, of the Quiche Mayan *Popol-Vuh* and the *Walam Olum* of the Lenape. But even this information somehow evaded my overall sense of Native *civilization* or remained stubbornly isolate from a more persistent cultural narrative that I was familiar with inhabiting, in which Native culture was an *oral* culture and therefore didn't have, or even understand, the concept of writing. I had witnessed these practices and then conveniently *unwitnessed* them to maintain the integrity of Western nationalist paradigms. Useful for me, then, is not only the manner in which Brooks introduces a counternarrative about Native writing, but also how she sees this narrative originating from what she refers to as "Native space."

Native space, as Brooks conceives it, is a site both conceptual and geographical. It consists of the cognitive space that arises from "a network of relations: the marriages and relationships that connected people and the places they inhabited," but it is also the physical space of villages and "waterways containing many different groups of people as well as animal, plant, and rock beings that was sustained through the constant transformative 'being' of its inhabitants."⁵⁰ Ultimately, I feel it is a narrative space that exists within a chain of stories and traditions that are passed from generation to generation and remain deeply rooted to a relationship with a particular geographical environment.

When Europeans arrived on these shores, they too entered into this Native space, which Brooks metaphorically equates with "the Common Pot," where "sharing space meant sharing resources" and where the actions of all its inhabitants "affected the whole."⁵¹ Part of the colonial project of acquisition and containment, however, was to transform Native space into colonial space, and this too occurs, in many ways, on a textual or conceptual plane. As Mary Louise Pratt points out in her influential treatise on colonial travel narratives, *Imperial Eyes*, from the very first moments of encounter the colonist regarded both land and inhabitants as resources to be contained, collected, and sold on the open market. Much of how we